

From the Mid City Messenger

<http://midcitymessenger.com/2014/10/08/new-book-serves-as-time-capsule-for-1950s-mid-city-neighborhood/#more-7464>

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*The Bell Theatre is remembered in the book "Mid-City Errands," written by Ronald Fisher.*

If he thinks about it hard enough, Ronald Fisher can still remember how the best roast beef poboys in the world smells.

***Ronald Fisher will read excerpts and sign copies of Mid-City Errands at Maple Street Book Shop, 7523 Maple Street on Thursday, October 9 at 6 p.m.***

"First of all, it was the Creole mustard," Fisher says, laughing about how he'd clutch the paper bag close to him during his walk home from the Triangle in Mid-City. "I would hold my nose in the bag just to smell all that roast beef and the bread and the gravy."

For the third grader, those poboys were one of the best things about living in New Orleans — just as good as the donuts from Picou's, a now-abandoned bakery that served as the family go-to after Mass on Sundays. Well, almost just as good.

Fisher, now an author and lawyer, has used childhood memories like those as fodder for a new book called "Mid-City Errands," which takes place in a pocket of the neighborhood near the old St. Rose de Lima Catholic Church on Bayou Road. Set in the 1950's, the fictional book follows the story of a

child who gets run over by a car, and a precocious seven-year old narrator who dedicates his time to solving the mystery of how it happened.

According to Fisher, the book, released in September, serves as much more than just fictional literature. It also acts as a time-capsule for an area once populated by sprawling Catholic families like his, who didn't blink an eye over baseball games played in the streets or kids who walked into corner bars to order cigarettes for their parents.

"Well, there was a way of life then," Fisher says, recalling the nuns at the St. Rose de Lima school, which shaped his upbringing just as much as the too-big barstools at the old bar Bruno's. "And building a story around that frame, like stretching a canvas around it, not only moves the plot forward, but is in itself interesting."

Mid-City plays such a big role in the book that each chapter is named after a place central to the neighborhood during the 1950s. As narrator Vonny Foster runs errands for his parents, readers learn how characters like quirky shopkeepers or meddling neighbors are not just integral to the plot, but are integral to the New Orleans that the author so vividly remembers.

Some of the places, like Picou's, are now just that — memories. Old-fashioned barber shops and neighborhood movie theaters, like the Bell, provide glimpses into a time that is no more.

Others, such as the Fair Grounds, or Stallings Playground, remain an integral part of life in the neighborhood today.

"I did that on purpose, too," Fisher says. "It's not like everything just disappeared."

That's important, Fisher says, because in a way the book speaks to the continuation of New Orleans' culture. While places change, some things have stayed the same — like quirky characters, families who celebrate almost everything and the strange, small businesses that make the city so unique.

For Mary Mouton, Fisher's publicist, one of the best parts of the book is not just the historical accuracy of it, but the point of view from which the memories are told. And, as someone whose family lived in the area for 70 years, Fisher is uniquely qualified to tell the story, she says.

It's appropriate, too, that the story is told from the point of view of a child, Fisher adds. Although he was raised in Mid-City, he left the area at a young age.

Fisher stayed in New Orleans through high school and college, and then went on a four-year adventure to Paris after that. Missing home, he came back to work in the oil and gas industry in New Orleans — until he was transferred to the Philadelphia area in 1985.

And that's where he's lived since, he says, working as a lawyer and now an author. But, like so many other New Orleanians who leave, he finds that New Orleans never really left him. Especially that little corner of the city near Bayou Road, "a wonderful place to grow up" where he used to play baseball surrounded by aunts and uncles and cousins.

"For me," Fisher says, "the neighborhood is my family. Not only did my grandparents, born in the 1880s, raise their 11 children there, but many of those children, my aunts and uncles, raised their children there too. In my mind, Bayou Road and Broad Street is my family, even if my cousins and I now live all over the planet."